



# Season 4, Episode 15: Great and Diverse Books + Picking a Book Club Book

Mon, 11/8 • 51:29

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:10

Hey readers, welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you know, we don't shy away from those strong opinions. So get ready.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:24

We are light on the chitchat, heavy on the book talk, and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. We'll discuss our current reads, a bookish deep dive, and then we'll press books into your hands.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And reading seasonally makes me so happy.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:42

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico and I'm always willing to discuss the books I've read. This is episode number 15 of season four. And we're so glad you're here.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:54

All right, Kaytee, that was obviously the perfect intro because we want to let people know, for a deep dive today, we are going to be talking about something we actually get questions on quite a lot, which is, what are the best book club books? And even more importantly, I think we think let's talk about what makes a great choice for a book club because I think a lot of people, a lot of book clubs go wrong right there. Alright, so we're gonna get into that later on in the show. But first, let's start out the way we always do with our bookish moments of the week. What have you got, Kaytee?

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:30

All right. Last week, I mentioned that I was going out of town on a retreat from my family. When I was in beautiful Pagosa Springs, Colorado, I visited two bookstores. One of them was a used bookshop with a very interesting selection, we would call it. I did find *Unraveling Oliver* that you talked about last week, so I did grab that one. But then I bopped over to Bookends, which is the new and used bookshop in Pagosa and I accidentally made a friend. We walked through the store together, this middle aged gentleman and his wife, partner, girlfriend ish person. And I, all three were walking around the store together and we chatted about books, and we made guesses at the blind date with a book packages.

And by the end of our visit, I had convinced him to buy my current read that I was buddy reading with Kaytee Proctor. That'll come to the show soon so I'm not going to reveal the title. But for now, I just wanted to celebrate the way that people that are, even unknown to each other, can enjoy a bookstore together. It was so much fun.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 02:29

That is just one of the joys of life. It's actually one of the places, one of the few places because I'm so introverted, I don't naturally make conversation. A bookstore is one of the few places where I will start a conversation with a stranger and then end up talking. Now I'm surprised you didn't press All the Lonely People into his... maybe you did.

**Kaytee Cobb** 02:48

They didn't have it at the store because it's such a small title and unknown kind of over here. And Mike Gayle is so big in the UK and Pagosa Springs, Colorado did not have All the Lonely People.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 03:00

Well, hopefully we can get them a couple of copies over there with how much you're sharing this book and how many people are loving it, because that's a good thing

**Kaytee Cobb** 03:06

It makes me so happy.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 03:08

Well, my bite sized intro hinted at my bookish moment of the week. It's more something I actually haven't done in a really long time. But I'm doing it for a specific reason. Today for my bookish moment of the week, I'm actually bringing a book because we've been getting so many questions from people who are saying, I'm planning my Christmas reading. I want to get my Christmas reading going. But here's the problem, Kaytee. I also like to read Christmas books at Christmas time. So I don't want to read Christmas books in October so that I can bring - other podcasters, I'm looking at you Anne Bogel, you're doing the heavy lifting of reading outside the season so you can bring them to your audience in the season. I can't read Christmas books in October, but I know what I'm going to read and I'm looking forward to it very much. I want to insert it here so people can plan it and maybe read along with me. But we'll all read it at Christmas time. I want to talk about The Afterlife of Holly Chase. Have you heard of this book?

**Kaytee Cobb** 04:09

No. Although Holly Chase sounds familiar.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 04:12

Right. So last year it's actually we're getting ready to celebrate Roxanna and I's one year anniversary of buddy reading together.

**Kaytee Cobb** 04:18

You guys are cute.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 04:19

I know we're adorable and so one of the first thing she said to me last year was "You know what you should read this Christmas? You should read *The Afterlife of Holly Chase*." But because of scheduling and everything I put it on my calendar for this year. It popped up and I was like yes I bought it. It's by Cynthia Hand and if that name sounds familiar to you, she's one of the authors of the *My Plain Jane*, *My Lady Jane* all the those Jane books which I love that series. I love the voice. That voice from the bit of pre reading that I've done comes into *The Afterlife of Holly Chase*. It's basically a riff on the Scrooge Christmas Carol story only the lead character is a woman and a younger woman. And it's very, very modern. But Roxanna read it and loved it. She pressed it into my hands last year. I'm going to read it this year. And I want to be sure that you guys know about it. So if it sounds interesting to you, you can read it this Christmas. I'm going to pair it, I'm going to do a book pairing. And I'm also going to read *Marley* by Jon Clinch, which is not sassy and saucy like the like *The Afterlife of Holly Chase*, but also related to the Scrooge story, but it concentrates on the *Marley* character. So I'm going to do that as a book, like, right around Christmas or book pairing writer and Christmas. And I just wanted to insert it here in the show that's going to drop in November so people can get themselves ready. If that's the kind of reading that you like doing.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 04:31

I do have *Marley*, like I own it on Audible. So I'm planning to put that one this Christmas as well. It'll be a not purposeful buddy read.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 05:53

Exactly. Right. very casual and, and no pressure.

**Kaytee Cobb** 05:57

Right? Nobody's asking anybody to read this. It's great.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 06:02

All right, good. Okay, Kaytee, let's talk about our current reads. What have you got today?

**Kaytee Cobb** 06:08

Okay. My first current read this week is *God Spare the Girls* by Kelsey McKinney, which we've been seeing all over the place. Meredith, I've seen this in a book flight for you. Have you picked it up?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 06:20

I haven't picked it up. But not because it's not interesting to me. In fact, I did a book flight read a little bit of it was very interested, but it just didn't fit my exact mood at the time. But our really good friend Sarah, from Sarah's bookshelves live, read it and loved it and actually pressed it into my hands in particular. So I really do want to read it. What did you think of it?

**Kaytee Cobb** 06:40

Perfect. Actually I'm going to pull a little bit from Sarah's review when I talk about this. So I feel like this book has been set up everywhere. So I'll just give you a brief rundown here. Luke is the pastor of a mega church in Texas and has even found some additional fame viral on the internet for the way his sermon on purity culture went and landed with his daughter. His daughter, Abigail, his eldest daughter, is often the silent partner in these sermons because she helps her father write his content. She is contracted with her younger sister Caroline, who is sliding into sin while questioning her faith. Shortly before Abigail's upcoming nuptials, a secret is revealed that shakes the family and the congregation to its core. Luke has been having an affair with another woman. The two sisters flee the family home and head to their grandmother's ranch in order to avoid the messy drama of their parents and the prying eyes of their fellow churchgoers. I would say that this story that is obsessively about faith and church and purity culture, but really for me, it was a story about sisterhood and love and friendship and where those intertwine. So I was interested in it because of the megachurch angle and the purity culture angle. But when I stopped thinking of it as the former and started thinking of it as latter, I found that the story really drew me in. You can also tell from this description that this is not a speedy plot driven novel. It's very character driven. It's introspective and moving in a slow way. Sarah from Sarah's bookshelves mentioned in her review of this one, that it would be a great pick for book clubs, which is why I wanted to bring it to this episode because there's so much to discuss here. No matter what your faith background, no matter what your family makeup, no matter what kind of drama you've had in your own family, which is why it fits so perfectly in this episode. There's so much to pull apart and get into deeper conversations with other readers about and for that reason I really loved it. It's *God Spare the Girls* by Kelsey McKinney.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 08:38

And did you do this one on audio or in print?

**Kaytee Cobb** 08:41

I did listen to this one. Character driven stuff, for me, it almost has to be on audio because otherwise I will not get drawn into the story.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 08:49

Right. And I think that was the other piece of why I decided to set it down because I thought this one might be really, really good on audio. So it was a good one. Okay, good. It was good. Okay. Well, Kaytee, I'm doing something else that I literally have never done before. And you're going to be so surprised and proud of me. Because I am bringing three current reads all by non white authors.

**Kaytee Cobb** 09:14

Oh, Meredith, you just made my heart happy.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 09:17

I know. I know. It's something that in 2021 I've been, I've been really, really trying to be more intentional about and but I also really want to stay within the kinds of books that I like. And so I've been super happy to be able to bring those two things together. So the first book I want to talk about is a cozy

mystery. That's by a Black author, and I loved it. It's *A Glimmer of Death* by Valerie Wilson Wesley. Now, what's interesting is that I got this book from my Book Drop subscription, which I've had for a long time and I've mentioned a couple times that it's not always such a big hit for me. Here's what I am realizing with the Book Drop subscription. Actually, more of the books are a hit if I read them Kaytee. The key is that I have to actually read the book, interesting. I can't just kind of read the back and go like, I'm just not sure about this and set it aside. Because lately I've been picking some of them up like this one and it has really surprised me. So here's the setup of *A Glimmer of Death*. So our lead character is just one of my favorites. Her name is Odessa Jones. I love her so much. She has an inherited ability to read emotions of people, even emotions that they're trying to kind of hide, and to foretell danger. And until our book opens, that had basically protected her for most of her life. But recently, she's had a really rough go of it. She became a widow unexpectedly, and her finances are such that she was about to lose her home and the catering business that she and her husband had built. So things have just not been going well for her. But she decides that the only thing that is going to work to get her back on track is for her to just move forward with her life in a completely different direction. So she takes a job at a real estate firm, run by an all kinds of shady owner, this guy's name is Charlie Risko, which is such a great name for a super greasy shady white guy, right. And then, of course, because it's a cozy mystery that we're reading here, Charlie's brutally killed, actually quite brutally, and Odessa's co-worker is arrested for the murder. But it can't be sure who's guilty because as with any good cozy, the dead guy is a bad guy. And there are many people with many reasons to want him dead. I really liked this book, this book just flew by it was the perfect book at the perfect time. You guys know what I always say about cozy mysteries. You read them, when you're in the mood to read them, you don't pick them up when you want a hard boil, when you want a thriller. When you want it, you pick it up when it's what your soul needs. That's what I did here. And it was very successful. As I said, I loved the Odessa character. I really from the first page wanted to know what was going to happen to her and I really wanted good things to happen. Not just her, but to her extended family and friends who we also get to know in the book. So I love it when we're kind of brought into an entire cast of characters that we that we love to love. And there's several characters in this book that we can love to hate, including our dead guy, Charlie Risko. I also loved the second sight elements of the story. As with good cozy mysteries, they can add in some things that are a little bit over the top but if they're done well as Valerie Wilson Wesley does here, they're not crazy. They don't take you out of the story. They just kind of make you smile and add to the story. And it is a cozy but this is a cozy with some substance, which is what I really really like in my cozy mysteries. I want there to be some substance. I want there to be some backstory, and we definitely get that here. There's also a pleasing touch of romance. I am definitely going to read more in Valerie Wilson Wesley's backlist, and I'm happy to say that *A Glimmer of Death* has been picked up as a series. So I will want to know more about what happens to Odessa Jones. So this is *A Glimmer of Death* by Valerie Wilson Wesley.

### **Kaytee Cobb** 13:29

All right, my second book this week is called *Let's Tell This Story Properly* by Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, which is a mouthful. It is not always that I bring a short story collection to the show, a lot of times because they're hard to talk about. But this one had an overarching theme that I really loved. This is a collection I read slowly but steadily with the group that I've affectionately nicknamed the "short story sisters". It was organized by Katie Sikkes about a year ago now. And we've read more than 15 books

together this year with more plans in the works to finish out the the rest of 2021. It's a really great way to read together and having that much buddy reading under your belt like you're finding with Roxana, Meredith, it means you have the ability to refer back to other stories that you've read, right? And find common themes and say, "Oh, remember in Gentleman in Moscow when this happened and see how we're seeing that play out again here." It's just really great to have that like shared history together and be able to refer back to it. So this collection includes mostly stories of Ugandan immigrants who have come over to Britain, and the way that that plays out both in the UK and abroad when they return home to Uganda to stay or to visit. The title story of this collection Let's Tell the Story Properly is unforgettable. It's about a funeral and a wife, a second wife who knows her place but maybe doesn't. It's hysterically funny at times while also being deeply moving and about women like coming together in solidarity. And I loved it. It's such a great story. I want everybody to read at least this one. This one story from this collection. All of the "short stories sisters" really loved it. While that one is the highlight of this collection, in my view, and in our view, there's so much in these pages and the way that she pulls together different storylines and you see them like crop up in other stories. It's one of my favorite ways that short story collections can come together because you see characters, you know, interwoven throughout the stories so I'm really glad I read it. I'm so grateful to Katie every time she makes this, like big stack of reads for us to go through. This one is Let's Tell This Story Properly by Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 15:46

All that sounds great. And you're so right, the shared history when you're reading together and you have all that, it really does make every book that you read even a deeper reading experience because you're bringing all of that together. Alright, my second book that I'm going to bring is very, very different from my first one. Nothing about this next book is cozy but it is so so good. This was a five star read for me I want to talk about Grown by Tiffany D. Jackson. So Tiffany D. Jackson has become an absolute auto buy author for me. I love everything that I've read by her. I have White Smoke on my TBR. It's literally next up for me and I'm so excited to read it. Grown just solidified her place as an auto buy author for me. Okay, this book was one of the choices from the Novel Neighbor in a recent Indie Press List month and I was so glad to see it as a part of our stack. I immediately picked it up to pre-read it like we do for our Indie Press List books. This is what we do Indie presses to support of our Patreon content that we do for our subscribers. And I'm supposed to just pre-read these books and sort of you know read 40-50 pages. I ended up reading the entire thing. I could not put Grown down. Here's the setup. Our lead character is Enchanted Jones. She's a 17 year old aspiring singer. And when early on in our book she meets legendary r&b artist Korey Fields at an audition that Enchanted is doing and between the two of them sparks immediately fly even better Enchanted dreams becoming a famous singer take flight because Korey makes it clear that he really wants to help her. And everything seems too good to be true to all of us reading it right until Enchanted wakes up with blood on her hands and zero memory of the previous night. The question that we're faced with right from the start of the book is who killed Korey Fields? We know as we read that even before there's a dead body Enchanted dreams have majorly turned into a nightmare because Korey's charm and his star power hide a really controlling dark side and now he's dead. The police are at the door. And all signs of this murder point to Enchanted. This book is a barnburner. Kaytee, you read this one, right?



**Kaytee Cobb 18:11**

Yeah, I also could not put it down.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:14**

Right? That's he we don't do that with all of the Indie Presses books. But this one just grabbed you by the throat and will not let you go. And this is what I love about Tiffany D. Jackson's writing. Because normally this setup, a 17 year old aspiring singer getting involved in a relationship with an older normally very frankly I would be like I just can't with all my teenage stupidity. But Tiffany D. Jackson writes Enchanted in a way that we understand, we remember what it's like to be 17 in all the things that that means, what it's like to really want something for yourself what it's like when there's a guy who seems really awesome. And you want to believe even though signs begin to point that he's not you want to but you know, she just puts you right there. I loved and chanted I never felt, I felt frustrated and scared for her. I never felt frustrated with her. And that to me is a real feat with this with this particular book. I loved the fact that Tiffany D. Jackson does a great job describing Korey's insidious grooming. It really speaks to the way as a mom of teenagers, I think that this is especially top of mind, it speaks to the way that things happen really slowly that begin to get us into trouble. One thing's okay and then the next thing is maybe not and then we find ways to talk ourselves down from that niggles that's in the back of our heads. And I started thinking not only did that happen to me as a teenager, and I worry about it for my teenagers, but this also can happen to us as adult women in a lot of different situations. And so I found myself really thinking, When am I shutting down the niggles in the back of my head because we see Enchanted going through this. We see Enchanted's parents struggling with this issue. And this construct with the mystery that she puts in here who killed Korey Jackson that we know right from the beginning is so expertly handled, it just unfurls perfectly. And that I think, is what had me turning the pages so quickly. This is just a barnburner of a book and exactly why the second Tiffany D. Jackson puts out a book, I am buying it. This is Grown by Tiffany D. Jackson.

**Kaytee Cobb 20:37**

I mean, same. I also have White Smoke on my shelves. It's ready for me as soon as I'm ready for it. It's very ghostly. So I kind of wish I had gotten to it in October.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:47**

Right. And a lot of people are talking about it as being another grab you by the throat. Her writing is just like that.

**Kaytee Cobb 20:54**

Yes, yes, you did mention grooming. And it's probably obvious. But gosh, y'all there are so many trigger warnings in this book, the grooming the like, emotional, sexual. There's just a lot of icky in here. So especially if you're going to hand it to a teenager, you probably want to pre-read it. And if you're an HSP, you probably don't want to pre-read it, you probably want to stay far away.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:15**

Exactly, exactly. But I do want to say, I think that it's an important book for us to read as moms of teenagers, whether your teenagers are boys or girls because it's not just r&b singers who can begin to

have relationships with our kids, right? It could be a YouTuber, it could be someone they meet on TikTok, it could be all of that. So this book just had me thinking about all these things. But it also had me really just wanting to figure out what happened. And that intersection is such a sweet spot. So thank you again to Novel Neighbor for making sure that this book got in the stack for the Indie Press List because it's just I'm so glad we could put into a lot of people's hands.

**Kaytee Cobb** 21:57

Okay, so my third book this week, I'm going to kind of bring us up a little bit. I've got some middle grade for us. It's *Race to the Sun* by Rebecca Roanhorse. This middle grade Indigenous fantasy novel will have you on the edge of your seat as we adventure with our young protagonist Nizhoni Begay. Nizhoni is in seventh grade, and she can see monsters. You guys, it's not a talent that many people have. But she can definitely tell that the dude who showed up to her basketball game is a monster. Nobody else can see that his eyes are glowing red. Thankfully, her brother Mac believes her and her like crazy talent as does her best friend Davery, which is good, because she'll need them both on her team. When the monster shows up to her home the next day disguised as her father's new employer, and attempts to kidnap the kids, but instead gets away with her father, Nizhoni is set on a quest to get him back. Weaving in Navajo legend of the Hero Twins in a contemporary setting. Nizhoni, Mac and Davery must journey across New Mexico, which you know, I loved, to the Navajo Nation, and complete a quest to set the world to rights. Y'all, this is so good. I have goosebumps right now. I listened to this one, which I highly recommend because of the Navajo names and legends woven through. I finished it in a single day. Rebecca Roanhorse is also also the author of *Black Sun*, another Novel Neighbor Indie Press List pick, another Indigenous fantasy novel, but this one is middle grade. And that one's YA. So this one is much more accessible, much lighter reading. The characters jumped off the page, the action did not stop. And the mythology woven throughout made this one a complete and total win for me. I loved the talking toad. I loved the different, you know, grandmother figures we get to meet in this. I love meeting the sun. All of it is so incredible. And then you weave in the southwest landscape. Traveling from Albuquerque into the Navajo Nation places I drive through all the time. It made it just 100% I loved it from beginning to end. It is a *Race to the Sun*, an excellent pick for your middle graders and for you adults, by Rebecca Roanhorse.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 24:13

I was gonna say I'm gonna want to pick that up too, because her writing is incredible. She's really good.

**Kaytee Cobb** 24:19

Yeah, she's really good.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 24:20

My third book is *Three Dark Crowns* by Kendare Blake. Have you seen this cover? It's got a really pretty cover.

**Kaytee Cobb** 24:27

Yes, I've seen the cover.



**Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:29**

Right. It's YA fantasy. So they so often have these gorgeous covers, but I really liked this. Here's the setup. Our setting in this YA fantasy is the island of Fennbirn. Now here's what's interesting about Fennbirn: in every generation, on this island, a set of triplets is born, three queens, all equal heirs to the crown and each possessor of a different kind of coveted magic. So our first triplet is Mirabella. She's a fierce elemental able to spark flames or vicious storms at the snap of her fingers. Then we have Katharine, who is a poisoner, one who can ingest the deadliest poisons without so much as a stomachache. And then we have Arsinoe, a naturalist who is said to have the ability to bloom the reddest rose and control the fiercest of lions. But becoming the Queen crowned isn't solely a matter of royal birth, each sister has to fight for it. And it's not just a game of win or lose. It's a game of life or death. The night the sisters turn 16, the battle begins. And the last Queen standing gets the crown. I know this is 100% what would happen if Hunger Games and The Selection and Furyborn had a baby. It would be this book. 100% So, this book is interesting on a couple of levels. First of all, several different listeners had DM'd me directly to say that this might be right up my alley, and they know my taste really well because it absolutely was. So thank you to all you listeners who make sure to you know, to bring these books to Kaytee and I's attention. We really do take your recommendations. Also, this story had a few things in it that surprised me. There were definitely elements that you see in YA fantasy quite a bit. But it had some elements that were really different. And the quote at the top of the cover is really what sealed the deal for me. I had to get it the moment I read. "Three dark queens are born in a glen. Sweet little triplets who will never be friends. Three dark sisters are fair to be seen, two to devour and one to be queen." I love a creepy rhyme. Yeah, I don't know where that comes from Kaytee, but I am a sucker for a creepy... And it should be noted that one of the elements that is really different is that this book is fairly gory. on several levels. I think I hadn't expected especially the poison elements to be quite so gory. But they really, really were. I don't say that in a bad way. Because for me, this was an interesting, edgy element to the series that you don't normally see in YA fantasy. So I liked it. But I wanted to be sure to bring that up. Because again, you don't normally see that level of gore. This is very much there in a major way. And I will also say that this book definitely ends on a cliffhanger. But it's a part of a four book series. And all four books are out right now. So I feel like I need to tell you that when you read the book it does in on that cliffhanger, but I'm not gonna just leave you hanging there. So those are I think important things to know. I will say that I was very interested all the way through. I was definitely rooting for one of the sisters over the others, but it had less to do with personality and more to do with the kind of magic I personally would like to be able to do have the three different kinds of magic. I don't think that the writing has the maturity of for example, Furyborn or the Sarah J. Maas ACOTAR Series, but it's definitely worth reading if you're in that mood for interesting magic, and lots of political and murderous machinations because this book has that piece in spades. Also, it's a really great book to read to make you feel a lot better about your relationship with your sister. I'm just saying these girls have a tough go of it. So this is Three Dark Crowns. By Kendare Blake.

**Kaytee Cobb 28:53**

That sounds so good. Meredith I'm really looking forward to that one. It's like I need another YA fantasy story series, like I need to hole in my head. But I just love them so much. So you can count on the fact that this is going on my TBR.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 29:09

I have to have it in my rotation like I have every fifth book or so I have to pick up a YA fantasy and luckily our readers make sure I know about all of them so I can dip into them.

**Kaytee Cobb** 29:21

Yeah, they're certainly really good at sending us recommendations, right? I get like people are like, "Kaytee, I hugged this book. You need it." And I'm like, fine. It's on my TBR.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 29:31

See I get "Meredith this book is really, really gory and murderous. You have to read it."

**Kaytee Cobb** 29:35

You're like, "Yep, got it. Got out my bloody bookmark, and I'm ready to go."

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 29:40

Ready to go. So Kaytee, that is the end of our current reads. Of our six reads, what I'm noticing is that five of the six of them were by people of color, and I am super happy about that. A, because it's something we care about, but you know what I'm even more happy about because it wasn't anything that we planned or did really purposely, we were just bringing books that were really good that were really interesting. And because we're being intentional about reading all over the spectrum, five of the six of them were not white authors. And I just, that's what makes me super happy.

**Kaytee Cobb** 30:13

Yeah, and it really is, it really points to the fact that you can find books by people of color in any genre you love, because we brought you short stories and murder and fantasy and middle grade and YA and all the different things that you might want in your reading life. So gold star.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 30:28

I love it. I love it. Okay, let's talk a little bit about our deep dive today. Again, we get lots of questions with people asking us, "I've just been put in charge of my book club, or I have this month is my month to choose a book club book, what books are best for book club books?" So we wanted to dive into this, and we're going to kind of do it in two parts. First, we're really going to talk about what we think makes a good book club book. Because it's like "teach a man to fish," this is really the important part of it, then we'll also get into a few books that we think fall into those categories and might be good picks to get you started. But mostly, let's start out talking about Kaytee, what do you think is just something that is a must have in a book club choice.

**Kaytee Cobb** 31:13

I think it is perfectly encapsulated in the little note we had in our episode planning spreadsheet for this one, which was juicy discussions. We want books that have people talking, right? You don't want to have to follow the reading guide at the back and ask a bunch of yes or no questions that does not get discussion going. You want something you can pull apart, something that people are going to argue over gently, of course, but disagreement is good for discussion. You want big opinions. Learning and

unlearning I find is really great for book clubs. We have books that surprise, books that cause different emotions and ones that maybe if you go look at the reviews, and you're like, I'm not sure if this is a great one, if there's one star reviews, and five star reviews, and a lot of both, it's probably a great book of choice. Right?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 32:04

Exactly. The more divisive, the better. I also think it's really important for us to step back even one step further and say, like we talk about "reader know thyself", reader know thy book club, right? So, Kaytee, if you and I are in a book club, there is no question that we would want to choose a book that is all about that juicy discussion. Hopefully, that's what most book clubs are doing. If you are involved in one of those book clubs, where really, they don't the majority of the people, maybe you're an outlier in that group, I just have a feeling our listeners have this happen, they actually want this right. So let's like, let's name the fact that this could be something that's going on. If you're involved in one of those book clubs that wants to drink wine and chat more than they want to talk about the book. That is okay. You just need to reframe that time in your mind. Less about book club, more less about book more about club, right? So in that case, choose books that are going to go down easy, or they're going to be ones that people want to read. And just be okay with the fact that okay, maybe they got 20 pages into it, maybe they finished it, who cares. That's not what we're here for. But if you're involved in a book club that is actually wanting to talk about the books that you're that you're bringing, and actually wants to finish it, I would say all those things, Kaytee, that you just said are true. I also think we need to just name you probably if you're having like a monthly book club, you probably should pay attention to the fact that you don't want to choose a book that's really, really long.

**Kaytee Cobb** 33:39

Correct. Yes. I mean, it gets really hard to pick something over about 400 pages for an average reader to say, "I'm going to dedicate a substantial amount of my reading time to this book for this month."

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 33:51

You want something that's not too long. I think in a very perfect world, you want something that sounds really interesting. So like, *Leave the World Behind*, I think is the ultimate book club book, right? It's not very long. It's got a great premise that you can kind of hook people on. And yet it is going to engender all kinds of conversations. Because you are going to have people come into that room heated up with how much they hated the book, heated up with how much they loved it, and just ready to have a conversation about it. So to me, that is just I mean, there's lots of books that fall into this category. But that's just a really good kind of stereotypical book club book.

**Kaytee Cobb** 34:33

Definitely. I also want to before we get into some more like actual book choices I want to point people to the recent episode of *Bookend Homeschoolers* that Amy Allen Clark was a guest. She talks about book club books, and one of the things she mentions is that she chooses her book club books for the full year in advance, and then she makes a t-shirt. So people already have buy-in saying I really want to have finished all 12 of these books, but at the beginning of the year, they're saying that because that way at the end of the year, they can rock that T-shirt with pride. And I love the idea of making sure

you've got buy-in on your book club that gets you people who are committed readers that are going to come back over and over and over again. That episode is full of great tips. But I thought that one was a really good one to pull out here and talk about how, especially if you're that kind of book club, where you know, each person chooses three books for the year, then we have 12. Set it at the beginning of the year. People can look for them on sale. People can find a Kindle deal. Get them to buy in to the titles you've chosen and get excited about them right at the outset of the year. So I thought that was a good tip from our friend Amy.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:41**

Absolutely. That's a great episode, a great pair for what we're talking about today. And I totally agree, I think that it's really important to have a sense of, you know, buy in to make sure that everyone feels like they're heard in their choices. Now, that does mean that you're going to have some, you're going to have some up and down with how some of these how some of these things, how some of the books roll out. But you do have that year long commitment. I think it's a great idea.

**Kaytee Cobb 36:09**

Yeah, definitely. Okay, Meredith, I have to say I knew you were gonna put *Leave the World Behind* on this list. For me, one of the most discussable books that I've buddy read, I don't book club really, was *A Good Neighborhood* by Therese Ann Fowler. That book, so many emotions, so many opinions about the way things rolled out, the different plot points, and a lot to pull apart and disgust from the Greek chorus to the ending to everything in between. That is one that is going to get your book club chatting, juicy discussions.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:40**

Well absolutely. And that plays in, and I had a feeling that that was going to be on your list. And I want to pair that, and I want to suggest other people pair that with *Good Neighbors* by Sarah Langan. Now, when we talked about these books on the show, we talked about them being related, but different. And I think it would be a really interesting combo, because they're very different books in a lot of ways, but they're very similar in some other ways. Anytime you can choose books, where you're what's happening in the book, has a lot of draw a lot of connection to the kinds of lives that the people in the book club have, I think that also creates really great discussion, because you're seeing yourself in those characters. And you're asking yourself, what would you do if a sinkhole opened up in our neighborhood here, and our kids were playing, you know, like that kind of thing. That's something that happens in *Good Neighbors*. But that's another interesting thing that you can do with your book club choices is pair books together. And then like you were talking about earlier, with your buddy reading, then you're you're now bringing your shared reading history to bear on this new book.

**Kaytee Cobb 37:50**

Yeah, and I think that is another great thing to take into account, the buddy read nature of a book club, where you're actually building upon your experiences together. So if you want it to go something kind of close to home, like *Good Neighborhood* and *Good Neighbors*, then you might pull something that is very different from the experiences of people in your group. Just last weekend, I discussed *How the Word is Passed* by Clint Smith, which is almost like a field trip in book form. The 11 people that showed

up to chat with me on Zoom, we traveled around the country. In our Zoom discussion we talked about where would you most like to go? What would you most like to see? What was the big jaw drop moment for you in this book, and what broke your heart open the most and that learning and unlearning is also really powerful for a book club discussion. And it's a way to, again, we've talked about maybe you're the reader that is the one pushing your book club out of its comfort zone a little bit, a book like this is a great way to get some discussion going and to push that boundary a little further.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:51**

And so another book that falls into that kind of similar category. But Kaytee, this is really I think, going to be upsetting to you. But I want to put it on the table. Because I think a really interesting book club book would be The Southern Book Club's Guide to Slaying Vampires right now. I know that was a tough read for you. I know that that was a tough read for you. We agree that it was tough, largely because of the timing in which you read it. But all but the fact that I loved it, although I read it at a at a different time than you and again, that timing element was big. But you and I had very viscerally different feelings about this book. And that book is across the board, people either loved it or they hated it. But either way they had a lot either way A. they finished it. Because it's so right. You finished it. It's so propulsive, but it has a lot to be it has a lot to discuss. And it has it has a lot to discuss, especially as it has to do with issues of race and power in marital relationships. And you know, this that was set in the 90s. How much further have we come? You know, all and it's set all within the bounds of a book club. So all those things kind of give you that familiar place to start, but then push you out of your comfort zone on a couple of different levels for that discussion later. So I just want to posit that I think Grady Hendrix 's The Southern Book Club's Guide to Slaying Vampires would be a great book club book.

**Kaytee Cobb 40:19**

Definitely. I mean, I agree, I did not like that book, I did not like my experience, I did finish it. But I had so much to talk about with the people that I knew that had read it ahead of me so that I could come to them with my big feels and my big emotions and tell them why it was hitting me so hard. And even that, even coming to book club with something that makes you a little bit vulnerable, like myself with that book, or, for example, This Is How It Always Is by Laurie Frankel. Really personalizing an experience that makes you feel a little vulnerable. That is how friendships are deepened. So if your goal in a book club, which I think is the goal for a lot of us is to find readerly friendships, finding books that really pull back the layers and make you feel a little bit uncomfortable. That's how those friendships get deeper, sitting around and drinking wine together helps also, of course, but you're having those discussions, and making it clear that you're willing to go there and get into that conversation with other readers that I mean, it's where the magic happens.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:28**

No, absolutely. And so two books I want to put, I want to put into that category of if you are in a stage of life, where for example, maybe we've got a young a lot of young kids happening amongst your group, you're moms with a lot of young kids, I want to put a book pairing out that is The Push by Ashley Audrain and The Need by Helen Phillips, because I think that that's a really interesting book pairing. And both of those books do exactly what you were just saying, Kaytee. If you're in that season of life, young motherhood, these books really put you into discussions of what is it like on the inside of your

head when you're going through motherhood? What are the expectations of society or of ourselves? Are we meeting them? Are we feeling we're falling short? Those books are propulsive. They're not very long. And they really are going to open up some discussion that I think is going to do exactly what you were saying. Bring in some vulnerability and transparency, and really, really kind of open those layers up into deeper friendships.

**Kaytee Cobb** 42:36

Definitely, if you're getting to the end of a book club discussion, and you realize, Wow, we talked about a 400 page book, and there are seven of us. And it only took 30 minutes. Because your discussion is not robust. I do want to throw out a plug for a short story collection as well, because like we noticed with *Roar* by Cecilia Ahern, there can be good short story collections, and other kinds of short story collections, but diplomatic. And either way, people are going to be able to pull one story, and you all will have read it. And you'll all be able to dive a little deeper into it. One of my favorites that I've read over the past year is *The Women of Brewster Place* by Gloria Naylor. And that one, it's only probably 10 stories, but they're each so powerful. And somebody being able to talk about each one makes sure that that discussion is going to be longer and more robust and more juicy, which is what we were looking for a juicy or discussions in our book club. So yeah, I think those are great, great options Meredith.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 43:38

They really, they really, really are. And I was going to end on a short story collection too. We're very much on the same page today Kaytee. You Think It, I'll Say It by Curtis Sittenfeld I think would be a fantastic book club book for all those reasons. It just, they're stories that are gonna open up a lot of discussion and potentially open up places for us to have that deeper, more personal discussion. Like you said, that is where the magic happens. Yeah, all right, good. So hopefully, we have given you guys some parameters for making your choices, and also some good places to start. And again, even if you don't, if you know, you don't want to do a book club, maybe in person, because for variety of reasons that can be difficult. Remember that, especially if you're a part of our bookish friends group on Facebook, which is a part of our Patreon for \$5 a month, lots of buddy reads can begin to form there and that can really begin to fill that slot. And in that case, in the bookish friends group, you know, you're going to be a part of a ton of really good readers who want to have those juicy discussions. They certainly do. Alright, so let's press some into people's hands. Kaytee, what book are you going to press today?

**Kaytee Cobb** 44:48

Okay, y'all, you already know. I am not a good book club participant. I can buddy read but I am no bueno at reading a book that someone else chose for me. That could very well be because the one time I finally got involved with a book club and dove in, the book we read together was *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot, and we had such a great time discussing together that I was sure that no other book would ever measure up. So today, I'm going to ruin your book club experience as well. This book is narrative nonfiction, about cells and science. It sounds pretty boring, right? Henrietta Lacks was diagnosed in the 1950s, with a rare form of quickly replicating cancer, the biopsy that her doctor took of her cells, multiplied prodigiously, which I love that I got to use that word on the show, like nothing he had ever seen before. Because of the way they replicated. The cells, which



became known as HeLa cells. He for Henrietta, La for her last name, Lacks, essentially became the gold standard for scientific study. They've been used the world over for decades. At this point, if you piled them all on top of each other, every cell that grew from this strain, the pile would weigh over 50 metric tons. Think of how small a cell is, you guys this is bonkers. And yet, when Henrietta died of her illness, she was buried in an unmarked grave. As the impoverished daughter of enslaved ancestors, there was no money for anything more than that. Nearly 20 years after the fact her family had no idea that their mother, daughter, sister, aunt's cells had made it possible to make medical advances in nearly every single field. This was probably my very first foray into narrative nonfiction, and it set the bar so high. Along with that the discussions that we had at this book club meeting, while not divisive, were certainly wide ranging full of nuance and detail that I would have missed reading the book by myself. It released in 2010. I read it in 2014. And now seven years on, I still think about it regularly. That's why I'm pressing it into your hands. It's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 46:59

I'm so glad you're pressing this because it is one of my favorites. I loved this book. It's so good. And like you said, it's about cells and science. And this is the best of narrative nonfiction, because it reads like a novel. It is fascinating. And I remember so much of it, because it's that well written. Yes. That's a really, really good one. Okay. So I'm going to press one more book that I think would be a fantastic book club book. And that's *The Power* by Naomi Alderman. Did you read this one?

**Kaytee Cobb** 47:30

I did. Yeah.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 47:31

It was a big sort of hyped book at the time a couple of years ago. And I think that it is very just perfect for having discussion that you maybe wouldn't have otherwise. So here's the setup. So in this very dystopian novel, we have a world that right at the start looks very, very similar to our world now until something changes. It starts out with just a few girls, and then it really mushrooms from there, teenage girls suddenly have immense physical power. They can cause agonizing pain and even death, by zapping people with their hands. And with this really small twist of nature, the world dramatically resets. I love the concept of this book. It just as a pure thought exercise, it is absolutely fascinating to think what would happen if all of a sudden women everywhere, not only had this physical power, but we completely with it, we would completely shed something that I think we carry on our shoulders all the time. But we really sometimes don't even think about it. And that is a physical fear of anyone around us. Imagine for just a second what that would be like. I loved that piece. I loved the way that Naomi Alderman has this roll out in society. And I also love the fact that she has this kind of societal look in this book. But then we also were following three specific characters. And I really like how we see it play out amongst these three specific characters. The book itself moves along really, really quickly. Some of the plot lines I found to be more riveting than others. But there were so many really memorable scenes. *Super Handmaid's Tale*, no question. I think the thing that interested me the most and the thing that I have thought about and talked about many times since I read it is what would happen if all of a sudden women were the most powerful gender. And she weaves a story that shows us is it possible that women would change fundamentally with that much power? This book made me think, it made me turn

the pages and it made me want to talk about it and it makes it a perfect book club book. So this is The Power by name Naomi Alderman.

**Kaytee Cobb** 50:01

Perfect. Two cosigns on these books we want to press into your hands because we both read both and we both loved both.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 50:08

I love it so much. All right, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

**Kaytee Cobb** 50:18

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 50:22

Full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps, so you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found on our website at [currentlyreadingpodcast.com](http://currentlyreadingpodcast.com).

**Kaytee Cobb** 50:33

You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or email us at [currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com).

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 50:40

And if you love what you've heard here today, and you just want to be able to hear more, join us as a Patreon subscriber for \$5 a month. You get a ton of great content. And you can join our bookish friends group on Facebook, which is where so much magic happens. If you also want to help us you can rate and review us on Apple podcasts which we love. And you can shout us out on social media. Every one of those things makes a huge difference toward us finding our perfect audience.

**Kaytee Cobb** 51:08

Bookish friends are the best friends, you guys, all of these things are helping us grow and get closer to our goals. Thanks for doing that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 51:15

Alright, until next week. Happy reading Kaytee.

**Kaytee Cobb** 51:18

Happy reading Meredith